

SportsWise Physiotherapy

MAY 2013

NEWSLETTER

CONTACT US

Thomsons Lake

4/850 North Lake Road,
Cockburn Central,
WA 6164

TEL : 9417 2777
FAX : 9417 2888

OPENING HOURS :
Monday to Thursday
7AM - 7PM
Friday
7AM - 6PM
Saturday
8AM - 12PM

South Street

Suite 12,
73 Calley Drive,
Leeming,
WA 6148

TEL : 9313 7433
FAX : 9313 7533

OPENING HOURS :
Monday to Thursday
7AM - 7PM
Friday
7AM - 6PM
Saturday
8AM - 12PM

Willetton

Willetton Basketball Stadium,
Burrendah Boulevard,
Willetton,
WA 6155

TEL : 9312 1188
FAX : 9312 1199

OPENING HOURS :
Monday, Wednesday
2PM - 7PM
Tuesday
3PM - 7PM
Friday
12PM - 3PM

OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

Craig Allen
Hadyn Sleeman
Bronwyn Smith
Lennon Correia
Andrew Dunnell
Wern Jiunn Chin
Chloe Itzstein



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Adhesive Capsulitis

WHAT IS IT?

Adhesive capsulitis, commonly referred to as frozen shoulder, describes the common shoulder condition characterised by pain and stiffness in the shoulder joint. It is a painful condition that causes great frustration for patients due to its slow recovery.

WHO GETS IT? WHAT CAUSES IT?

It is reported to affect 2 – 5% of the general population, increasing to 10 – 38% in patients with diabetes and thyroid disease. Individuals with the condition are commonly between the age of 40 and 65, and the incidence appears higher in females than males. It is also more likely to occur in people who have recently experienced prolonged immobilisation of their shoulder, such as after surgery or an arm fracture.

To date, the exact cause of the condition remains unknown. Apart from diabetes and thyroid disease, other risk factors include stroke, lung disease, heart disease and rheumatoid arthritis.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE SHOULDER?

The shoulder joint is encased in a capsule of connective tissues. Adhesive capsulitis occurs when this capsule thickens, swells, and tightens due to the formation of scar tissues. As a result, joint space reduces, making movement of the shoulder stiff and painful.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Diagnosis adhesive capsulitis is often achieved through clinical examination alone, but imaging studies can further confirm the diagnosis and rule out underlying pathology.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Restricted shoulder movement in more than one direction
- Significant pain especially at night
- Pain is usually dull or aching, but can be excruciating with abrupt motions

The normal course of adhesive capsulitis includes the following three stages:

- Stage 1: The "Freezing Stage", lasts from 6 weeks to 9 months. Patients generally have a slow onset of pain in this phase. As the pain worsens, the shoulder loses its movement.
- Stage 2: The "Frozen/Adhesive Stage", lasts from 9 months to 15 months. Patients experience significant restriction of shoulder movement despite an improvement in pain.
- Stage 3: The "Thawing Stage", lasts from 15 months to 24 months. Patients experience minimal pain and a progressive improvement in shoulder motion.

PHYSIOTHERAPY MANAGEMENT

Treatment focuses on restoring joint movement and reducing shoulder pain.

Interventions may include the following:

- Heat therapy/Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)
- Stretching/strengthening exercise
- Joint mobilisation

PROGNOSIS

Adhesive capsulitis is self-limiting. Despite its slow recovery, the condition usually resolves gradually without surgery, but may take up to two years. Most people regain their shoulder motion over time.

The above is intended as a guide only. If you recently suffer from shoulder pain and would like to see a physiotherapist, please contact us at any of our three practices.